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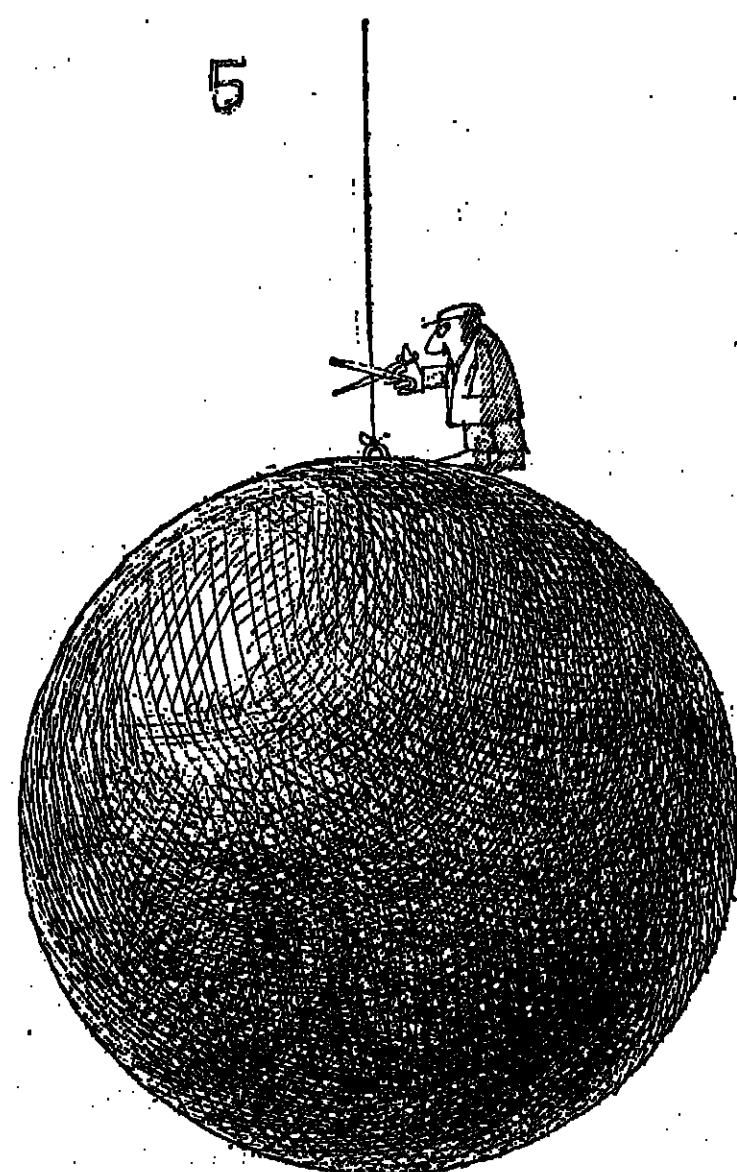
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THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

FRIDAY • 5 SEPTEMBER 1980 • No 4040 • 35p



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THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

SEPTEMBER 5 1980

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ART

Under Western eyes

By E. H. Gombrich

MICHAEL SULLIVAN:

Symbols of Eternity
The Art of Landscape Painting in
China
205pp with 115 illustrations.
Clarendon Press: Oxford University
Press £10.
0 19 817351 2

This attractive volume grew out of Michael Sullivan's Oxford Slade Lectures of 1974, which must have given his audience much pleasure. It is intended "for anyone who loves art but knows little about Chinese painting, and would like to approach a little closer to one of the greatest artistic traditions of the world". Written with evident warmth and sincerity, the text surmounts many of the obstacles which might have thwarted this purpose.

The first obstacle lies in the nature of the subject-matter itself. Some of the greatest monuments of the Chinese landscape tradition are hand-rolls of considerable length which were meant to be viewed (from right to left) by unrolling and rolling one section after the other. Works of this kind elude reproduction in a small format and so the author had to confine himself to details of scrolls, or to hanging scrolls and album leaves which can more easily be fitted on to a conventional page. Even here, though, in the small and inevitably rather indifferent reproductions, little survives of the subtlety and force of the originals and it is a measure of Professor Sullivan's power of persuasion that we believe him when he says that a pale fragment of a scroll captioned "Travelling Up-river" gives such a vivid sense of a river journey in North China in the depths of winter that it makes us shiver to look at it.

The same sense of involvement stands the author in good stead in the narrative sections of the book and makes the reader almost forget the tour de force needed to tell a story extending over some two thousand years in seven brief chapters. It is a story which, as the author reminds us, cannot be told without reference to the history of China, the rise and fall of dynasties and the consequent shifts in the centres of cultural activity. We are made to see the impact of these vicissitudes on the lives and positions of the artists. From the beginning of the history of art in China is rich in personifications of about whom the sources give us many vivid character traits and biographical incidents: his panorama of the past is a series of thumbnail sketches of those eccentric scholar-artists who carried the tradition of the art which concerns him.

Professor Sullivan is aware that his very skill in presenting an integrated picture has its pitfalls. Writing about the masters of the Southern Sung who had withdrawn to Hangzhou after the fall of Kaifeng, he suggests that "even the spring blossoms on the radiant plum trees by the water-side seem to express a poignant yearning, a struggle for survival rather than a joyful sense of renewal". "I do not know"—he continues—"if I am reading too much into these haunting pictures, and I have perhaps deliberately chosen ones that convey this mood. There are more cheerful ones."

Quoting some of the cynical utterances and despondent verses of the eighteenth-century master Chang, he admits again that the painter's "lovely paintings of bamboo and orchids give no hint of the bitterness he felt". As indeed how could they? Evocations of the Zeitgeist and of psychological states are certainly useful literary devices for turning isolated facts into a coherent and memorable story, but for that very reason they tend to mask the complexities of life.

But in any case Professor Sullivan's true aim lies elsewhere. He wants to offer an interpretation of Chinese landscape art which will bring it closer to the Western reader. His title *Symbols of Eternity* offers the key to this interpretation. It is taken from the Book of Wordsworth's *Gratitude* in which the poet describes his crossing of the Alps

in words which strikingly recall the images of Chinese landscape paintings: "... The immeasurable height / Of woods decaying, never to be decay'd; / The stationary blasts of water-falls; / ... the rocks that muffled close upon our ears, / black dripping crags that spake by the way-side / as if a voice were in them, the sick sight / and giddy prospect of the raving stream, / the unfetter'd clouds, and region of the Heavens, / Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light / were all like workings of one mind, the features / of the same face, blossoms upon one tree, / characters of the great Apocalypse, / the signs and symbols of eternity, / of first and last, and midst, and without end."

No doubt these lines show how much is universally human in the response of the Western poet and the Eastern painter to the sublimity of mountain scenery. They might also be used to point to the difference between East and West. Wordsworth feels crushed by the overwhelming power of divine omnipotence; his emotion is rooted in dread. It is also the dominant reaction of the Chinese painter? Is it not relevant here that after all it is he who has created—or at least re-created—these symbols of eternity? The power is his to manipulate the forces of nature in magic and ritual, in gardening and in painting. Sullivan reminds us that in the early fourth century "Royal parks were landscaped on a huge scale to suggest Mount Kun-lun to the West, the Eastern Sea, the blessed island Penglai and haunts of immortals".

And that during the Tang dynasty miniature landscape scenes were devised on trays, the ancestors of the Japanese *bonsei*. In like way, he suggests, a picture could become a mysterious thing that "... contained the essence of the world of nature". It was in fact in that glorious eighth century, the period of the great poets Li Po and Tu Fu, that Wang Wei, himself an outstanding poet, became the most famous landscape painter. We do not know what his paintings looked like, and no doubt later achievements were subsequently attributed to him, but the conception of the artist as a creator which he shares with his contemporary Wu Tao-zu remains inseparable from the tradition.

Here one might think less of Wordsworth than of the chapter in Leonardo's *Paragone* entitled "The Painter is Lord of all kinds of people and of all things". "If he wants to look from the high peaks of mountains at a great plain and desires to see behind it the horizon of the sea he must, if he is to look at the mountains ... in fact whatever exists in the universe as essence, as presence or as imagination, he has it first in his mind, and then in his hands."

Maybe this conception is not incompatible with the interpretation that what the artist creates are not so much symbols of eternity but rather symbols of transience. We

learn in fact that the seventeenth-century painter Huang-jen was a devout Buddhist in whose landscape the author senses the expression of the idea of his creed that all phenomena, the very evidence of the senses itself are illusion, may, akin to a dream. ... To express this notion of illusion and non-attachment in the visible forms of mountains, rocks, and trees, in such a way as to move us by their beauty would seem to be impossible. Does Huang-jen? Professor Sullivan asks, "achieve it because, being Chinese, he is not only a Buddhist but also a Taoist, to whom nature is no mere illusion but a numinous presence, the very evidence of the Real, to be identified with and felt in his innermost being?"

If we could, by sympathy and intuition, probe to the heart of this mysterious duality, we might come some way toward understanding the mind of the Chinese landscape painter. It is a noble ambition, but is it ever capable of fulfilment? Can we "understand the mind" of Aldorfer or of Ryusdael, and how could we be sure if we did?

One approach to this goal which the author hints at seems almost to lead us astray. He likes to suggest that the philosophy and the religion of the Far East have become more intelligible to us because we have arrived, chiefly through the physical sciences, at a view of the nature of reality that in certain fundamental respects is strikingly similar to the view that the East arrived at, through intuition and reflection, over two thousand years ago.

Pleas of this kind do not improve with repetition. Some seventy years ago Kandinsky proclaimed that modern science had dissolved solid matter and was about to confirm the spiritual insights of Eastern wisdom. But any comparison between Taoist mysticism and Einstein's theories can never do justice to either. Unlike the mystic the modern scientist does not seek to grasp the essence of reality; he tries to construct a hypothesis that stands up to observational tests.

The fact is relevant, because Sullivan also invokes the authority of Ruskin, whose conception of landscape painting he finds to be close to that of the Chinese. No doubt Ruskin expressed the hope that landscape painting might "become an instrument of gigantic moral power", but we need only open *Modern Painters* to see where he looked for that power. In the chapters "Of Truth of Skies", "Of Truth of Earth", "Of Truth of Water", etc., with their notorious demonstrations of how far Turner surpassed his predecessors in the accurate observation and rendering of all these natural phenomena.

What Chinese landscape painting shows is simply that Ruskin was wrong in regarding truth to appearance as the indispensable criterion of artistic achievement, and that not because its symbols convey a deeper or higher or more essential truth but rather because all art operates with symbols. The symbols of landscape painting—rocks, pines, waterfalls, clouds or huts can be com-

bined, modified and refined in countless ways, they can incorporate more or less of natural appearances, but they could never serve as faithful records of a particular view without losing their identity and purpose. There is no need to apologise for the absence of perspective, all the less since central perspective could not be reconciled with the format of a handscroll. Chinese artists were in any case discouraged from taking this road by the critical opinion that any concession to mere realism was vulgar.

While this caveat may sound agreeable to the contemporary Western reader the lack of originality which is so apparent in this history of the genre must put him off. Professor Sullivan tries from the beginning to overcome this resistance by reminding us of the role of music in Western society: "... in listening to music we are, for the most part, listening to familiar works, and this does not trouble us at all. In the hands of a master with a tradition which must decide the convention is 'hollow' and when it is charged with psychic power, as no doubt it sometimes is. No wonder they are so often thrown back on subjective impressions or withdrawal towards an expressionist aesthetic, but strictly speaking it merely shifts the question from the performance to the performer without leaving us any wiser."

It sometimes looks as if the critics of Eastern painting were trapped in a similar predicament. Faced with a tradition which is profoundly conventional they must decide when the convention is "hollow" and when it is charged with psychic power, as no doubt it sometimes is. No wonder they are so often thrown back on subjective impressions or withdrawal towards an expressionist aesthetic, but strictly speaking it merely shifts the question from the performance to the performer without leaving us any wiser."

The illustration in Professor Sullivan's book of a landscape by Li Tung would certainly not permit us to say that it is a "coldly monumental work" and that the brush-strokes of an earlier master have been "hardened into a formula". But then the painter of that landscape was the dreyer of the imperial academy in the eleventh century which is accused of having created "a gulf between official art and the kind of painting that serious gentlemen did for their own pleasure". Given the bias of our time in favour of outsiders and against academics there must be a strong temptation to invest the work of the former with more conviction than that of the latter. Yet those of us who are fortunate enough to remember the great Chinese Exhibition at Burlington House in 1935/36 are unlikely to forget the famous scroll "A myriad miles of the Yangtze" by Liata Kuo, a master whose style is also dismissed by the author for its "immediate and obvious appeal", though we read that "it came to represent to Laurence Blyden, Ernest Fenollosa, and other early enthusiasts the very quintessence of Chinese pictorial genius". Were they really wrong because in China "not everyone shared these exalted feelings, or expressed them in such conventional terms"?

Of course we must allow Sullivan his personal taste, all the more as he helps here to overcome a prejudice which was much in evidence at the time of that memorable exhibition. Visitors then used to linger in the rooms where early paintings were displayed but hurried through the remainder since they would not baffle with "late" productions. Here Professor Sullivan redresses the balance by teaching us to see the range and individuality of eighteenth-century masters who knew how to forge a personal style or styles from the rich gamut of the tradition which they studied so eagerly. It is only in the nineteenth century that he finds nothing of merit to report—a view which is not altogether borne out by the works from the Huzhou Collection recently shown at the Museum Yamato Bunkan of Nara. About the twentieth century the author is again eloquent and persuasive; having devoted a monograph some twenty years ago to Chinese art in the twentieth century, he pleads for an open-minded appreciation of the varied styles now practised. Naturally he has no truck with the "cultural revolution" which all but smothered these hopeful developments, but did he have to write of China's "cultural revolution", that she "is said to have 'devoured the masses'". To one reader, at least, this gratuitous aside intrudes, a jarring note into an engaging book.

Requiem for D.M.

In summer's heat, under a great tree

I hear the hawks cry down.

The beauty of earth, the memory of your fire

Tell of a year gone by and more

Bringing the leaves to light: they spread

Between these words and the birds that hang

Unseen in predatory flight. Again,

Your high house is in living hands

And what we were saying there is what was said.

My body measures the ground beneath me

Warm in this beech-foot shade, my verse

Pacing out the path I shall not follow

To where you spoke once with a wounded

And wondering contempt against your flock,

Your mind crowded with eagerness and anger.

The hawks come circling unappeasably. Their clangor

Seems like the energy of loss. It is hunger.

It pierces and pieces together, a single note,

The territories they come floating over now:

The escarpment, the foreshore and the sea;

The year that has been, the year to be;

Leaf on leaf, a century's increment

That has quickened and weathered, withered on the tree

Down into this brown circle where the shadows thicken.

Charles Tomlinson

Economic man

By Janet Morgan

DOUGLAS JAY:
Change and Fortune
A Political Record
515pp. Hutchinson. £16.
0 09 139530 5

Thank goodness for the misprints, flickering beacons along the way. Here is the author, here before the Friends of the Earth were born, reading Green History at Oxford, there he is again, a "crypto-junior Minister", at even more mysterious times, the Ministry of Defence. Sometimes, the errors are delightfully apt: Richard Crossman, a politician who sounds like a politician's dictionary of disguises, *The Names of a Cabinet Minister*. This doubtless came in handy when the Lord Chancellor changed his mind on the EFTA surcharge, Jay's only colleague to do so, apart from Crossman after. Amidst this swarm of mistakes, it is rather odd to suddenly find a single erratum slip, correcting all misspellings of Robert Schuman's name.

Such inaccuracies, and the excitable punctuation in the last quarter of his book, must have saddened Mr Jay, who is a scholarly and conscientious man. Presumably the perfection — and expense — of books today will join his catalogue of things which are not as they were. *Queensland Time* in Parliament, now dominated by "the" alibi of the 1970s, is a publically funded press campaign, once limited to spreading "information" or arguments which were not seriously in dispute between two major sections of public opinion (e.g. road safety or national savings but not nationalisation or, most

horrid, propaganda for an EEC referendum); the British Press, swallowing the views of "almost any country but their own"; standards of official economy, faded since the days when Permanent Secretaries and Junior Ministers had no official cars and Lord Bridges (who lived at Epsom) could be seen running down the pavement of Great George Street so as to reach the Chancellor's room at 9.30. (Incidentally, Mr Jay's book is still veiled in the corners and traffic-lights between Great George Street and the House of Commons, getting across Parliament Square according to legend, in two and a half minutes.)

Frugal and serious, the author's own career sets a stern example of economy. His early childhood was happy (apart from a demoralising encounter with a North London psychiatrist who sought to remove a persistent fear of the dark), but it was followed by a tortured term at preparatory school. By the end of the First World War, however, the Jay's prosperity had so declined that "from this moment onwards I was keenly conscious of the family's need to save money, and felt an abiding sympathy with all those who were short of it." At Oxford Jay decided on a regime of austerity; in his later career as a civil servant, journalist and politician he often found it hard to make ends meet. He was always respectful of the taxpayer's money; only after eight years in the House of Commons did he agree to join a parliamentary visit abroad and then his interest, amid the social distractions of Rio de Janeiro, was to study the causes of Brazilian poverty and the system of social services and taxation. It was eighteen years before the author acquired a family car, so precarious and unpredictable were his profes-

sional fortunes. (This sustained deprivation perhaps explains the passion which Mr Jay brought to the London Motorway Action Group, and its successful battle against the Inner Ringway Plan.) Always Mr Jay worked extremely hard, whether studying for a scholarship, devising schemes for development Areas, caring for his constituents, or fighting to keep Britain out of the Common Market. His book shows with what persistence and devotion he applied himself to realizing the aims of the Labour Party and improving the condition of the country he so deeply loved. But his tale has a curiously pessimistic joylessness; he undervalues his career, rather like his preparatory school, rather than enjoying it.

It is difficult to diagnose why Mr Jay's memoirs are, overall, so melancholy. The evenness of his account, the length and detail of his explanations. First, there is the fact that in the most difficult way, the author always conveys the feeling that he was right—more reasonable, better informed ("without of course those days any research assistance or such like"), more painstaking, efficient and resolved. Hating the personal rivalries of Labour politics, "which were forced on me by the system," Mr Jay vastly preferred Whitehall warfare, particularly when, as in his wartime days at the Ministry of Supply and the Board of Trade, important decisions could be taken with brisk small group of two or three, working informally round the clock. (The site for Heathrow Airport was decided on in forty minutes.) He and three colleagues invented to determine and fill "first, at the end of twelve years spent in the government service," the Preference machine still seemed to me the most efficient and successful organizing machine in which I ever had the luck to work—bearing some sections of the Treasury in Cripps's and Gaitkell's days." Was it

Douglas Jay who said, "the gentleman in Whitehall know best"? At any rate, his readers despondently feel that he might have done. The other unsettling aspect of this book is that its chapters are infused with doped paranoia. All Europeans, except Scandinavians, are deeply suspect, especially Walter Hukstein, Jean Monnet, General de Gaulle, with his "perverse and unnecessary resignation," and the entire French nation. (Crossman always maintained that Mr Jay's fanatical dislike of Europe dated from an incident in Vienna in 1933, when he damaged a tooth and broke off his honeymoon to come home to have it stopped. Mr Jay does not refer to this particular event.)

Emanuel Shinwell stalks like a villain through Mr Jay's chapters, particularly the pages on the 1946 "boneheaded perversity" which led Shinwell to tell Attlee: "Prime Minister, you should not let yourself be led up the garden path by the statistics. You should look at the imponderables." Another of his bogeys is Harold Wilson, whose activities at the time of the election to devalue in 1949 are here described at some length. And later recalling the decline and demise of the 1964-70 Labour Administration, Mr Jay laments that "but Hugh Gaitkell lived to head this Government, all this would certainly have been different."

As for Crossman, he comes in for a repeated drubbing. In 1931 he and Mr Jay and seven other New College friends were to have shared lodgings in the High Street, but Crossman accepted a post which obliged him to live in College and forget to tell the others. This was "a stunning shock to Jay, who had considered Crossman his closest confidant since Winchester days; 'we did not speak again for some years'. Later, Jay was to be constantly astounded by Crossman's apparent frivolity in serious matters and to deplore his colleague's habit of keeping diaries. Perhaps Mr Jay has since repented, for his compiled 'partly from private records', does from time to time look for evidence to Crossman's journals.

It is odd that in the pages of *Change and Fortune* Mr Jay's book this streak of paranoia should be so dominant. For his memoirs contains many funny stories, anecdotes and affectionate portraits of Aneurin Iwan, for instance, which hardly explained why he cared about the Health Service in October, 1945, by the time he devised an atomic energy policy, his messenger would be busy, tripping over the door to get himself a cup of tea. On whom Jay compares with Gaitkell is a niche for the Davenant policeman who sought to force the visitor to attend to the Chamber of the Exchequer at 5 am; the visitor himself said that he was at this hour, the policeman said "Oh, him. Yes, please come." Among several amusing pictures was before his first child, became City Editor of the *Herald*, in succession the Williams who was believed to have proposed his appointment. He told Jay that "Bevin as it were" was born in January, 1937, Mr Williams' City office, and his son-in-law and not myself, he had become City Editor of the *Herald*, Bevin remarked, and to [Percy] Cudlipp: "Well, this man Jay's appointment is a piece of nepotism."

Describing people, with his sensitivity, appears to be Jay's strength as a writer. His political history may be dry and laqueated, but he understands character, illuminating with anecdote, remembering a notion or trick of behaviour that struck him. Intelligently and personally aware, he is a means dedicated. Parts of his are extremely moving, when he speaks, for instance, of his father, the country-side, the death of his son-in-law and not myself, he had become City Editor of the *Herald*, Bevin remarked, and to [Percy] Cudlipp: "Well, this man Jay's appointment is a piece of nepotism."

A Fellow and his fetish

By Alan Bell

DAVID NEWSOME:
On the Edge of Paradise
A. C. Benson; the Diarist
405pp. John Murray. £17.50.
0 7195 3630 1

It was A. C. Benson's habit from time to time to plant what he called a "fetish" in some secret place—his house or some object ceremonially deposited, its presence to be checked now and again as a reassurance of continuity and permanence. His literary reputation, founded (to his own embarrassment) on such unworldly works as *The Upton Letters* and *From a College Window*, was a temporary vogue with an undemanding public, but it gave him none of the lasting fame for which he constantly yearned. He had, however, left one enormous fetish secretly planted, a sealed chest containing no less than 180 volumes of his diary, covering the last twenty-eight years of his life and written with all the literary fluency and observant skill at his command. Here at last is an object which will ensure that he is remembered as more than the author of a shelf-full of once fashionable spinster essays.

A selection from the diaries, remarkably frank in its inclusion of comments on others but naturally more reticent on Benson's personal life, was edited by his friend Percy Lubbock in 1927, and then the seals were placed on this massive social, literary, academic, and above all personal record. In 1975, fifty years after Benson's death, the Master and Fellows of Magdalene College, Cambridge, opened the box and had the good sense to invite David Newsome to investigate its contents. Dr Newsome had long been known as an authority on the Bensons, as the historian of Wellington College (where Benson's father, later Archbishop of Canterbury, was the first Headmaster) and even more notably from the sensitive portrait of the Archbishop and his eldest son Martin, who died very promisingly in a dream, in *Godliness and Good Learning*.

The problem of dealing with a text not far short of five million words in length must have been formidable, but by indexing, sampling, and sheer hard work, Dr Newsome has managed to extract a manuscript source but also of all Benson's innumerable published writings and many of his unpublished letters. Rather than merely present a selection from the text (although his publishers announce an Edwardian volume for issue in the autumn), Dr Newsome has wisely decided that a full-scale account of the diary and the diarist would be the best approach. The result is a study of unusual penetration, with sympathy and humour—a biography of rare quality. Occasionally the analysis seems rather repetitious, but the recapitulations are understandable as a study of so voluminous a document.

The very size of Benson's personal record is a reflection of the literary fecundity which produced his published writings. He was a compulsive writer in prose and in verse too, while he still practised it (the first six stanzas of his *Dirigible* poem in the *Oxford Book of English Verse* were composed in a dream, and fortunately the inspiration survived long enough for him to be able to complete it awake). The daily output of writing became a physical necessity to him, developed during his years as an Eton master and lasting for the rest of his life. As volume after volume of the diary was shelved with disconcerting rapidity, it became even more a necessary emotional outlet for him; as Dr Newsome puts it, Benson was one of those "who so enjoy the exercise of writing that his diary becomes a sort of personal indulgence—the satisfaction of some compulsive craving for self-analysis and self-expression." After some preliminary attempts, he started to write earnest soon after his father's sudden death, when he was under heavy emotional strain but found that the calls of duty on a leading family obsequies at the archiepiscopal more, however, was the public man of his Eton predecessor, William Johnson Cory's *Letters and Journals*

which had introduced him to the desirability of keeping a diary both for therapy and solace, an exercise to which Benson could add his own special blend of imaginative description and humorous observation.

He began in too great detail, the coverage and pace having to be established by trial. Length alone ensured that the earlier volumes, which cover the final years of his teaching career at Eton, now form the fullest account of a schoolmaster's life and trials ever written, with the pleasures and frustrations of his work there presented in great detail. Benson could, amusingly, see through the persona of his teaching manner, and the heavy scholasticism and classical specialization of the school provided him, as an educational liberal, with some of the irritation that was needed to fuel the journal. Other frustrations were there too, but not to be examined as closely. He was aware of his own sensitivity to boyish charm, which was the main-spring of his success as a teacher and tutor, aware too of the "sensus divinus" between the intellect and the affections (as Dr Newsome well puts it) that provided the light from which a man like Cory had fallen. Benson was realist enough to see the dangers, and Cory's career provided a powerful warning as well as a literary impetus. The tensions of Eton combined, along with various administrative problems, to his coming to find his work there "intolerable slavery", although it was not until he had rejected tentative approaches about the headmastership (after a lot of intriguing archdiocesan voling and no-voling) that he felt freed from the fascination of Eton.

Authorship and a rapidly growing literary celebrity offered him the chance to escape, and he took it. In view of the long depressions that were to come later in his life, it was fortunate that he did so. His biography (which is a fine thing among biographies of Victorian bishops) helped to establish his reputation, and his three-volume edition of Queen Victoria's early letters established his wealth as well as his position. For some time his principal income came from a poet, and his output included "Land of Hope and Glory" and other odes specially suited to Elgar, who set several of them to music. Benson moved from Eton to Cambridge, taking up a post called The Old Granary, in Silver Street. He told his friend and contemporary M. R. James that he had heard a couple of undergraduates discussing the name on the front door, "The Old Granary", one said; "I believe it must have been there; it's rather a good name."

The Cambridge to which he retreated seemed at first to be too much changed from his own undergraduate days at King's; old friends had gone and new acquaintances were suspicious of him. Magdalene, though a very down-at-the-heel place (the "feet" of the college, as it was called by one of his Eton colleagues sneered) chanced to have a vacancy for a non-stipendiary fellow, and Benson was soon reinstated in an institutional framework that had long been part of his life at Eton. He soon felt more at home in the college than he had been to the school, and now set himself the laudable aim of raising it up, by gifts and guidance, to its proper place in the university.

It took some time to settle into his life as a fellow. Several years went by before he came to a physical necessity to him, developed during his years as an Eton master and lasting for the rest of his life. As volume after volume of the diary was shelved with disconcerting rapidity, it became even more a necessary emotional outlet for him; as Dr Newsome puts it, Benson was one of those "who so enjoy the exercise of writing that his diary becomes a sort of personal indulgence—the satisfaction of some compulsive craving for self-analysis and self-expression." After some preliminary attempts, he started to write earnest soon after his father's sudden death, when he was under heavy emotional strain but found that the calls of duty on a leading family obsequies at the archiepiscopal more, however, was the public man of his Eton predecessor, William Johnson Cory's *Letters and Journals*

ungrateful.) His wealth increased in proportion to his dignities, and his gifts to march both; towards the end of his life he appears to have weighed an eighth of a ton and to have been worth an eighth of a million. Additional benefactions followed, financed by his own royalties and later by the offerings of one of his American lady admirers. The college was adorned and endowed as it had not been for generations. And further dignity was at last within reach, the Master'ship allowing him to claim in an honorary capacity the higher doctorate which his writings could never have earned; never a scholar, Benson achieved, *jura dignitas*, the scarlet gown for which he had so long pined.

College business did not diminish his literary output. *From a College Window*, the tone of which Newsome describes as "elderly and sedate, self-satisfied and avuncular, full of complacency and repetitious oracular utterances," was written very soon after Benson was elected to Magdalene. He could not resist the temptation of writing in the guise of an old-established academic venerable, to share with his undisciplined extra-mural readership the pleasures of his new appointment. Many more books and essays followed, as easily parodied in the family circle as his brother Monmouth Hugh Benson's "best-sellers of embarrassingly sentimental apologetics," or his cousin, the Earl of Bessborough's novels. Arthur Benson's books made him a comic figure in literary circles, as Edward Marsh pointed out when dissuading Mrs Brooks from having him as a contributor to a proposed Rupert Brooke memorial volume; but outside those circles their following was enormous. It was not all rubbish, and Dr Newsome rightly reminds us of the quality of the autobiographical writing of Benson's later years, including *The Trefail and Memories and Friends*, books which are a thing among biographies of Victorian bishops) helped to establish his reputation, and his three-volume edition of Queen Victoria's early letters established his wealth as well as his position. For some time his principal income came from a poet, and his output included "Land of Hope and Glory" and other odes specially suited to Elgar, who set several of them to music. Benson moved from Eton to Cambridge, taking up a post called The Old Granary, in Silver Street. He told his friend and contemporary M. R. James that he had heard a couple of undergraduates discussing the name on the front door, "The Old Granary", one said; "I believe it must have been there; it's rather a good name."

He was a sharp-eyed describer of ceremonies, once noting "the horrible mixture of gaiety and gloom which is produced by funeral pomp, the elderly man in deep with starchy, and with a subquent twinkle in the eye". Individuals were noted with a neat but never carping aptitude, nice similes abounding: the Duke of Cambridge with his face like a faded rose; the Duke of Devonshire, H. M. Butler (Master of Trinity) "like the Almighty in Blake's designs for Job"; Hardy (in 1912) giving the impression of a "half-pay officer from a not very smart regiment, wearing a hat with a very funny little round cap like a tea-cake".

The account is always acute, and such thumbnail portraits recall something of the style of his conversation; Hugh Walpole once noted that "Benson was a good talker; when he was thoroughly malicious, he picked out his friends' weaknesses like plums out of a pudding."

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True to type

By Peter Sutcliffe

BROOKE CRUTCHLEY:
To be a printer
192pp. Hodder. £8.95.
0 370 30304 0

An abiding passion for the letters of the Roman alphabet has governed much of Brooke Crutcheon's life. He recalls his excitement as a boy on seeing the splendid signs on Crewe station, a wide and extraneous, and it passes his comprehension that anybody can be so attracted by capital letters magnificently displayed. In *To be a printer*, an engaging autobiography, this theme is recurrent, and although the general tone and style is one of mellow satisfaction with a life well spent, evidence of decline into an undisciplined and phillistine age.

Brooke Crutcheon joined the Cambridge University Press in 1930, having successfully misled Walter Lewis, the University Printer, into believing that he knew nothing about the printing business. Lewis, who had a little dangerous knowledge from him, whom he succeeded as Printer, after the war, Crutcheon learnt mostly about business management and the running of a factory: it was from the able compositor, the eccentric F. G. Noble, and later from Stanley Morrison, that he learnt about typography, and what the latter called the "social responsibility of print." He was equally successful as businessman and typophile. He negotiated productivity deals with almost imperceptible degrees from the antiquated printing house in the Pitt Building to his grand new premises on the outskirts of Iowa. He once calculated that he set on forty-six committees. His extraordinary sensitivity to all forms of printing, his great scientific and mathematical works produced by the CUP, were works of art. But "even an income

tax form must be pleasing to the eye if it is to attract a cooperative response", he writes. Good lettering is essential to a civilized environment.

In book printing, however, letters have to be self-effacing. The ancient typographical Renaissance at the end of the nineteenth century, associated with William Morris and the arts and crafts movement, was not at all to Crutcheon's taste. It committed the sin of drawing attention to itself. Orientation, as he is the worst of designers, a designer who imposes his own ego on a book is a bad designer. The real typographical revolution came later, reaching Cambridge during the First World War. Men like Maynard Bruce Rogers, Francis Monotype, Oliver Simon, and behind them the Monotype Corporation, turned books once more into objects of unobtrusive beauty by making them easier to read and pleasant to have about: those were their modest but socially responsible aims. Crutcheon toys with the questionable notion that a relationship may exist between Roman Catholicism and good design. Many of those active in the printing world between the wars, including Morrison and himself, were Catholics, and thus peculiarly responsive to the discipline, order and authority represented by the "hierarchy of letters." Capital came first, in time and status, possessing a dignity absent in even the most elegant lower-case. But now times and tastes have changed, faith has been lost, and good typography cannot be expected to thrive in an age of indiscipline.

Despite a fierce campaign, Crutcheon lost the battle over motorway signs, which cried out for simplification. The prevalence of sans-serif disfigures the landscape. Fashions may alter, but "the direction for ever, a branch reminder of an aesthetically impoverished age." He was equally shocked by the incongruous and unbecoming of British Airways to adopt logotypes, even dropping the capital

initial for "Always" (and mention the dot on the "i") such magnificent structures as the letters.

The colleges of further education annually dispossess their students with diplomas in "Art and Design." Many are employed by publishers who in recent years have been usurping the printer's traditional functions, claiming for themselves complete control over the production of their books. Whatever the historical reasons for this, the result is a loss of craftsmanship and a loss of the discipline imposed by the book. The desire to do it differently can become irresistible.

Other sinister forces are at work. Walter Lewis abhorred book design; he said that he never expected to make a profit on a book and he was really pleased. Such a worldly attitude has come to be acceptable, or even quite commendable. A former Secretary of the Oxford University Press, R. Chapman, once wrote that he cannot make books cheap by being very busy. Unhappy, he says, you can, relatively, and happily, you may leave no alternative. But you can, relatively, and happily, you may leave no alternative. But you can, relatively, and happily, you may leave no alternative. But you can, relatively, and happily, you may leave no alternative.

Yet this is a proud and well-humoured book, and too much of the author's gift. For the years he helped to maintain the standards of the Cambridge University Press and there are many friends and associates in the book world and the United States, where his passion and reverence for letters. His book was finally published in Cambridge, set in Monotype. Benson as Cambridge printer was not allowed to design his own book? Really? It is a pity that the book was not designed by a printer like

viewpoint

LAURENCE LERNER

When a literary critic ceases to confine himself to analysing and appraising the work as finished product, and asks how it came to be what it is, he needs some sort of working hypothesis. What could the factors be that determine the nature of a literary work? I want to suggest as a simple model, perhaps in the first instance no more than a rule of thumb, that there are three: tradition, individual and society. From already existing literature certain ways of telling a story, certain character types, plot structures, metrical forms, image patterns and rhetorical devices, offer themselves as elements in each new work: that is the literary tradition, either explicitly formulated as conventions, or half-consciously followed as habits. From the personal life of the writer come the concerns, preoccupations, emotional needs, aspirations, disappointments and personality traits that push themselves forward and lead to the choice of particular subjects or particular ways of treating them: that is the individual element, and it too can function as a rule of thumb of consciousness. And every work is produced at a particular time and place: in a particular society, whose beliefs, assumptions, problems, conflicts and habits set limits to what can and cannot be expressed, and how it will be treated: that is the pressure of society, and it can be seen in two ways. If our conception of society stresses consensus, we shall look at the shared assumptions of the whole society, and say, this work is the product of eighteenth century England or the Greek city state; if it stresses conflict we shall look more at the particular group, sub-culture or social class, and say this work is bourgeois, clerical or by a woman. I believe that all these factors always operate, but that their relative importance can vary: and I am not sure that there are any others.

What is the origin of Mr Micawber? He can be seen as Don Quixote with a touch of Falstaff; or he can be seen as Dickens's father; or he can be seen as a comment on economic changes in the nineteenth century: this constant assurance that something will turn up is based on no systematic efforts to find employment, for he belongs to an old world of patronage rather than a new world of professions, but the comic treatment that makes his hopes ridiculous reveals the author's consciousness that this old world is ceasing to be viable. In much the same way, Colonel Newcome can be seen as a version of Quixote (and we know that because Cervantes's novel when he was writing *Don Quixote*, or as Major Carmichael-Smith, the author's stepfather (and we know that because he declared him to be the original), or as deriving from the Victorian respect for conventionalities, family affection and the stiff upper lip, and so as a figure who could never have been depicted before the nineteenth century. Or let us take Caleb Garth, in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. Here the literary origin is not particularly figure but a type, the sober practical or industrious workman; the personal origin is, once more, the author's father; and the social explanation will begin by observing that the society of *Middlemarch* is pre-industrial, but one in which industrialism is beginning to make impact, and Caleb represents those elements in the older world that are needed by the new. It is worth noting that in a brief summary like this I always take longer to describe the third element, the social, than the other two, because it is necessarily more exploratory: there is no particular pre-existing figure to point to.

Let us turn from individual characters to a whole book. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* belongs to a very old literary kind, the journey to the unknown, as found in the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid*, the *Divine Comedy*, the *Paradise Lost*, the *Walden* and the story of the Harrowing of Hell: it is so impregnated with ideas of exploring the unknown, of the dangerous journey that brings self-knowledge, that it is almost impossible to see it as anything but a journey to the unknown.

Conrad's trip to the Congo in 1890, which has many resemblances to the story, and which he regarded perhaps as the crucial experience of his life. And that *Heart of Darkness* is about colonialism and the scramble for Africa is obvious: it explores both the idea of Africa as an extreme situation in which normal habits are dropped, and the darkness of man's heart made plain; and as a set of alternative cultures as strongly entrenched and as effective for social control as the "civilization" which the Europeans bring. That makes it a contribution—showed, radical and terrifying—to contemporary debates on the White Man's Burden.

I need a poem to set beside these examples from prose fiction, and will take Auden's love lyric "Lay your sleeping head, my love." The simple fact that this is a love poem enables us to place it in a tradition, that by which love creates a shelter or retreat, a self-contained world, musically protected from the difficult reality that surrounds it; and one concern of the poem is to establish an ambivalent relation to this tradition. And the fact that it is a lyric makes the pressure of the society much less obvious as a determinant: that is what is meant by speaking of poetry as timeless. "Nights of insult" and perhaps also "fashionable madmen" are threats that could exist at any time, and perhaps only by placing the poem among the rest of Auden's pre-war poetry, in a world where "all the dogs of Europe bark", where love has to identify itself against impending war, can we become aware of its pressure of public violence. This need not make it a poem less universal, but we can see a particular social context being universalized as we read.

As for the personal factor, we can now that Auden is dead, mention that the poem was a homosexual, so that if the love is a particular person it must have been a man; and even if the love is no more individual than the Dolins and Julias of traditional love poetry, it was imagined as a man by the poet and by his circle of friends. Whether that fact need now become part of the poem's meaning is a nice question.

A brief commentary like this does not allow us to go into such questions, or to linger longer on the details. I must now turn to consider the objections to the threefold scheme I have proposed. Obviously there will be two kinds of objection: that there is too few, or that it is too many. To maintain the first, it is necessary to suggest others, and to claim that they cannot be fitted under these three headings. There are some obvious and universal factors that go to making a literary work that I exclude simply because they are universal: these are language and the natural world. Of course, English language is a determinant of Auden's poetry, but it is not a determinant of the poem's meaning: the language itself can only be used to explain the differences between a poem in one language and a poem in another. Similarly, nightingales and daffodils may have properties that influence the poems written about them, but these are available to anyone: what matters is the choice of these particular properties made by the poem, and it is very doubtful if much of the difference between "The Daffodil" and "Go lovely rose" can be explained satisfactorily. A much stronger candidate is the Christian religion, which is a major determinant of *Paradise Lost*, Aristotelian ethics of the *Faerie Queene*, Neoplatonism of *The Waste Land*.

Of course, this, like almost everything I am saying, opens huge questions of definition: what I am here asking is how far the literary work is not a direct response to social structures and movements (as Goldmann would have it) but responds to what has already been formulated in literary actual forms, though not necessarily in the form of literary conventions or patterns. I am not sure that it is possible to give the same importance to these as to any other factor.

factors is due to the rational ground which they will only be significant in certain kinds of work, or to a superstitious feeling that all good things go in threes.

The other objection, that there is too many, is of far greater theoretical importance. Such a threefold scheme can obviously be called pluralist, and so like all pluralism is subject to the attack of the monist; in the case of literature all the monisms are ready and waiting with powerful and time-honoured arguments. The monism of the individual maintains that nothing really matters except the creative act, that poems are the work not of traditions, sub-cultures, committees or doctrines, but of poets. It is orthodox Romantic doctrine from Wordsworth through Carlyle to Lawrence, and its vulgar manifestation, turning every discussion of a Yeats poem into anecdotes about Maud Gonne, need not destroy the seriousness of the view that the poet is a man speaking to men, who makes poetry out of the struggle with himself.

The monism of tradition has been as powerfully entrenched in English as in German scholarship, so I choose Leo Spitzer as its representative. For Spitzer there is a method for studying literature, which is philology (we can translate the German word); the nearest equivalent would be "literary history". To understand a poem you must read it as a poem, subordinating biographical data to the understanding of its conventions. Literature to such critics (we can add Curtius, or Harry Levin, who wrote an essay asserting just this) is an institution, and must first and foremost be understood in its own terms; literary forms have a life cycle of their own, largely independent of individual talents and social change.

But the most widespread monism nowadays is of course the third, the monism of society, and its strategy will necessarily be the opposite to that of literary history: instead of emphasizing the separateness of one factor it will emphasize inclusiveness. Neither the individual nor literary conventions, it will insist, have any existence apart from society. If this essay has any Marxist readers, they have probably been saying this to themselves from the first paragraph; but I must point out that you do not have to be a Marxist to say it (it can for instance be stated just as strongly in Duchampian terms). Individual poets are not self-sufficient. Literary conventions are themselves the result of social needs and pressures. Man is a social being, and the determinants of literature are all social.

The debate between these three monisms is fascinating and endless; but it was not for nothing that I began by offering a working hypothesis, even a rule of thumb. Literary criticism does not have to spend all its time on fundamentals: that way lies barrenness. Let the critic by all means decide which if any of these monist positions he inclines towards, but the practice of criticism need not result in three uncommunicating universes. The Carlylean will have to admit that sonnets or anti-Utopias or epistolary novels have a good deal in common with whoever wrote them, and even that two sonnets may have more in common than a love sonnet and satire poem. The critic who would point out how obviously they are the same must be a philosopher. The philosopher will have to admit that literary conventions do not drop from heaven but can often be seen as formulations of social norms or the hopes and interests of particular groups (though he may go on to point out how obviously they are the same). The philosopher will have to admit that there was a man called Dickens, whose novels have a good deal in common to the extent that a sentence by him can be instantly recognized as his who had a real father about whom he felt strongly.

To establish the fundamental or ideological position of a critic has enormous value; but we are not the mere prisoners of our monisms, however strongly you may feel that. It is ultimately explicable, as I have said, that it is more important for the critic to be able to see the difference between them.

Sundays

Autumn! It is autumn! Once again autumn!
The great gale and all its trail
Of reprisals, and of music... at seaside hotels.
Leaf-fall, full of Antigones and Philomels:
My granddaddy, Alas poor Yorick!
Lumps them pell-mell.

Love and straw-fires for ever!

The good young ladies
Involuntarily frail
File soberly this way
Summoned by the chapel-bell
Hygienically and most dutifully
As befits the "sweet" Sabbath-day.

How all around them groves purified
And Sundayified.

And how faces all grow long at the sight of them!

As for me, though I am the Great White Bear,
Brought hither by icyberg ferry,
More polar, more spotless pure,
Than those girls in white millinery;
Not, though, what you would call a churchgoer.
I am the Grand Master of Analysis;
Remember this.

And yet... and yet... why so pale?
Come, trust your old friend, you can tell me the tale.

Ah no? Can such things be?
I turn my face to the seas and the rough skies.
To all things that grumble and that utter sighs.

Such things! Such things!
Matter for sleepless nights and nail-bitings.

Poor, poor, for all their promiscuities!

And we! Drowned in such seas,
Plunged into such wonderment,
Fallen to our knees...

O wonder, found, and at once hidden,
So martyred, poor, yet full of passion,
Being, as it were, a thing forbidden
Never to be touched, save in dream fashion.

Wonderous thing,
Most violet altar, precious residue,
The universe
Has come of you
And planets in their courses are your nurse
From burping to marbling.

Oh, it is rich, not to be bought!
Just your dear eyes, there, in the skies—
Greater than God, higher than thought,
Those thoughtless and thought-coloured eyes!

So frail, so thin!
All that mortal warmth
Hoarded within!

O forgive her, if, unthinking,
(How well it becomes her!)
She makes eyes a little
To beg you a little
To have pity a little!

O frail, frail, and still aghast
For those Muses which I so mock!
Bend, bend your dear head; O look,
The spring-time, the lilac-bush,
I was not thinking, swear, of lovemaking
But of heavenly things!

O if, after morning Mass,
We could but vanish and be no more
—Being sick of the human race,
So well-contented, so cross,
There, at the church-door!

Jules Laforgue

Translated by P. N. Furbank

Information please

Jules Breton (1827-1906) and his daughter, Virginie Damone-Breton (1859-1924), French painters of the nineteenth century: whereabouts of any manuscript material, for an edition of his works.

Laurence Heywood, 31 Park Town, Oxford. Michelin House, 81 Finsbury Road, South Kensington, London SW3. Any material (manuscript, articles, newspaper cuttings, photographs on this building and its design).

H. F. Constantine, author of the poem "The Glory of War" (February 1916), any information about his life, and/or political activities, or about any connections with him, for a biographical and literary study.

Ernest Percival Rieu (1859-1934), author and editor of *Everyman's Library*: any information, or manuscript, or newspaper cuttings, or photographs, or any other material for a study.

Signs of the times

By Alan Montefiore

JOHN STURROCK (Editor):
Structuralism and Since
From Lévi-Strauss to Derrida
190pp. Oxford University Press.
£5.50 (paperback, £2.95).
0 19 215839 2

The "basic facts" about this book are—perhaps—as follows. Edited by John Sturrock it contains, in addition to the editorial introduction, a set of five essays on Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, Foucault, Lacan and Derrida by respectively Dan Sperber, Sturrock himself, Hayden White, Malcolm Bowie and Jonathan Culler. Its aim, according to the editor, "is to elucidate, without fear or favour, the work of five French thinkers continually associated with 'structuralism', and the aim of my preliminary remarks here must be to determine what the common ground is between the five of them which justifies their appearance in the one book". Of the five contributors, Sturrock is Deputy Editor of the *TLS*, Sperber is an anthropologist, Bowie and Culler are Professors of Literature and Hayden White is Professor of History of Consciousness; none of them, it is just worth remarking, is a professional philosopher as such.

So what is the common ground between the subjects of these five studies which justifies their joint appearance in a book with such a title? In his introduction, Sturrock quotes a remark made by Barthes in his *Critical Essays* of 1964: "It is probably in the serious rebours to the lexicon of signification... that we must finally see the spoken sign of structuralism." He goes on to comment: "What Barthes is saying is that a true ('serious') structuralist is to be recognized by the use he makes of a number of technical terms, taken over, as it happens, from structural linguistics." As he also points out, Lévi-Strauss is the only one of the five subjects of this book who would be

"at all happy to be labelled a 'structuralist'". But all of them have undoubtedly been greatly influenced by the work—and not only the vocabulary—of the great nineteenth and early twentieth-century Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Between these five at any rate this influence probably constitutes the strongest link.

So far as Saussure was concerned "any word in a language is a sign, and... language functions as a system of signs." A sign is to be analysed into two components: whatever it is that serves as a bearer of meaning—in the primary cases this will be a physical sound or mark—and a mental or thought component which constitutes the meaning. These he called respectively the signifier and the signified. Signifier and signified both depend essentially on the reference of each to the other for their very existence; and no sign could possibly exist in splendid isolation. For example, to think of its colour is to think of it as being of this colour and not of some other or more others; to think of its shape is to think of it under this aspect and not under that of, say, shape, weight or material composition. In short, the meaning of any one sign depends on the differences between it and other signs, and those of all other signs in the language and language as a whole may be understood as the system of all these inter-related differences.

Saussure's theory of language contains, it hardly needs saying, a great deal more than this. Exactly what each of these five French authors does with it and which elements receive most attention and further development varies considerably from one case to another. Moravcsik, as Sturrock points out, they can be compared and contrasted in varying groupings depending on which of their interesting relationships to structuralism is to be emphasized or relevance or interest. For example: Lévi-Strauss and Lacan are both universalists, both are concerned with the operations performed by the human mind in general... By contrast, Barthes, Foucault and

Derrida appear as relativists, preoccupied with the historical dimension of thought... From another point of view, Lévi-Strauss may be seen as the odd man out, not only as the only one of the five to proclaim himself a structuralist but, paradoxically, perhaps—as the only one not primarily concerned to show that lucidity contains always and necessarily some element of illusion, that we are mistaken if we believe that we "have language firmly under our thumb" so that we can make it "do exactly what we want". However, all five of the thinkers in this book are also writers. They are self-conscious about the form of what they write, and knowledgeable about the devices and effects of rhetoric. Indeed, they are all of them in varying degrees, not excepting Lévi-Strauss, notoriously difficult writers.

But why are these writers so difficult? There are no doubt many possible answers to this question too, but some of the main threads of one of the most important among them may be picked up by returning once more to Saussure. Given a view of meaning which sees it as lying incompletable within an open-ended system of differences, it must always be a mistake to regard it as lying straightforwardly within the clear, conscious intentions of a speaking or thinking subject. The meaning of one's own thought can never be given to one all at once, can never be entirely present to oneself in the immediacy of the present moment of thinking it: for it must depend always on its necessarily uncertain relationships with what has or might have come before, with what might now have been thought but wasn't and with what might yet be to come. Correspondingly, and if possible even more fundamentally, the conscious subject can never be more than partially and uncertainly present to itself. For consciousness of oneself as thinking subject is wholly bound up with the meaningfulness of one's thought; and this, as we have just seen, is always largely elsewhere, outside that present moment of illusory self-presence in which one

seems at least "to know one's own mind".

Moreover, there is and can be no way in which to think (meaningfully—but the "meaningfully" is here, of course, redundant) of a reality either natural or, even less, social, lying somehow and somewhere beyond the bounds of language with all its polyvalent slowness—except perhaps by thinking of it as the great undifferentiated unthinkable, the unnameable limit to all thought and effort and, indeed, to consciousness itself. But even to think of it in this way is to tread the ancient path of negative characterization through language; and we are back with all its uncertainties and evasions.

If this is one's view, or something like it, how could one possibly claim to be propounding the "truth" about literature (Barthes), the history of ideas, practices and institutions (Foucault), Freud and the unconscious (Lacan), or even kinship and myth (Lévi-Strauss)—though he, as we have noted, is less directly preoccupied with this predicament? Any superficially straightforward statement of the situation, such indeed as I have just attempted, must necessarily compound its illusions and mystifications; and even the reference to myself as the author of the statement is caught up in the same current of dispersal. All that I can do, therefore (or, perhaps better, all that can be done), is to construct a many-faceted discourse that functions at many levels, that doubles back on itself, that shows its own never properly steerable unruliness in the complexity and instability of its own functioning, that involves the reader in its own uncertainties as to what may have been meant by whom and as to what he himself may have understood; that, in a word, never lets him settle down to the entirely misleading comfort of an apparent clarity. Difficulty—clearly—is of the essence.

One of the great merits of this little book, however, is that the essays of which it is composed all give admirably clear and critical, while still deeply sympathetic, accounts of even the normally most impenetrable of these difficulties. It is quite beyond the limits of this review to try to provide summaries of their summaries. Let me note simply that it is particularly interesting to see Bowie's account of Lacan alongside Richard Wollheim's much more philosophically analytical discussion (first published in the *New York Review of Books* of January 25, 1979) and that Culler's concluding piece on Derrida is a marvellous model of how, in a short space, to give an illuminating account of the nature of what is for the most part a formidably complex body of work. (Derrida's basic criticism of the other four writers would be that they still fail to take proper account of the implications of their own theories of "discourse" for the discourses which they themselves produce. They may complicate their style; but they allow to their central organizing concepts a stability which, by their own terms of reference, these should not possess. One of the most fascinating aspects of Derrida's work is the way, or series of ways, in which he himself seeks to grapple with and to express this central paradox.)

One may have one's own personal grumbles and regrets, of course. Sturrock, for example, appears nowhere in the book. And it might have been stimulating and helpful to some readers, at least, had an attempt been made to relate the basic Saussurean problems of presence and absence to those—say—problems of time and self-consciousness which have dogged the history of philosophy (and indeed of theology and anti-theology) in focus some of which can be made very recognizable to even the most analytic students of these subjects. But one should not demand of one book that it should have been another. This one should be given a warm welcome for what, unpretentiously, it is.

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commentary

Burgess, Borges and Edinburgese

By James Campbell

Writers' Conference
Edinburgh Festival

When John Mortimer suggested on the first day of the Edinburgh Writers' conference that "You discover peoples' characters by the rubbish they speak", it did not augur well for the coming five days. The sense of unease was increased by the staging, which seemed better designed for a chat show than a conference. Of course, few people can have expected that serious questions would be resolved at the end of a week's discussions around the theme "Whose Language is it Anyway?" What we were presented with, in fact, were five days of what Gore Vidal called "bookchat". Some of it was very engaging and instructive bookchat. Indeed, Vidal turned out to be the best book-chatter of all.

Vidal told us that the only benefit of growing older was that one's critical faculty improved. This, he happened to Glenway Scott: "His critical judgment got so good he couldn't bear his own books." He was pessimistic about the state of writing in America: "Professor John Hawkes is a book for Professor John Barth to touch." The reason that the New York Review uses so many English writers is because most American intellectuals cannot write comprehensible English: "Our intellectuals are not very intelligent." Of *Analysis* he said: "Her diaries were always untruthful; she was forever talking about love and disapproval, like Vidal's law is that no good deed goes unpunished; she's been haunting me ever since."

There was a rumour going round that Vidal had greeted Anthony Burgess in Edinburgh with the remark "I still writing for an imaginary audience?" Burgess is no book chatter. In what was billed as an interview with organizer Frank Delaney, Burgess did the sensible thing and ignored the boyish, velvet-blazered, purring Irishman, introduced himself, and spoke gallantly for half an hour about

language. After that Delaney broke in: "I just want to rest your voice for a moment," whereupon Burgess, with hardly a glance in his direction, continued uninterrupted for another half hour. "I'm primarily concerned with producing patterns whose primary appeal is auditory. No book should be read with the eye." He announced that Hugh MacDiarmid was the greatest poet of the century, which must have pleased some of the assembly and he distinguished between the serious and the non-serious writer by saying that the latter is concerned with using those fragments of speech which the reader already knows, while the former is attempting to make the language anew. This must have baffled the man in the audience who had earlier proposed that the Queen's speech at Christmas was the model of perfect English. Burgess also told us that no one can sit down and write without being aware of Shakespeare, at which point Beryl Bainbridge, who had said that morning that she knew very little of Shakespeare — got up and left.

Next morning the strange tandem of George Steiner and Christopher Logue appeared in order to read and compare versions of Homer. Logue did the reading — from Chapman's 1616 translation — while Steiner gave a running commentary which included instant deconstructions. He sermonized with clasped hands and a fixed gaze in a stunned audience which throughout seemed happier with bookchat, pointing out that Logue's 1938 version of the war provided "impressions of boredom which had not been available since Waterloo".

When Delaney crept round to the back of the hall, as he did frequently all through the conference, he found a played hand and mouthed "I've got the disappointment." Immediately visible on Steiner's face. "We have been scratched the surface of our subject," he intoned to an exhausted congregation. It was a good example of the chat show presentation coming into contact with the serious lecture. At the point where earlier by V. S. Pritchett about Tolstoy's, shortening the average concentration-span had ironically been proved.

reluctant Wordsworth scholar had been persuaded to declaim Schumann's setting of Shelley's much underrated drama *The Pigeon*, a kind of communal hysteria had set in. Around a dozen free spirits disappeared into the incoherent octogenarian Beatrice Hans, who has built various local houses, occupied by Shelley and Mary in their wanderings.

The serious side of Shelley studies came out most interestingly in a talk by a young lecturer, Dr Hull, Angela Leighton, whose "deconstruction" of *Adonais* turned out to be an elegant and sensitive close reading — much to the relief of several who were led astray by deconstruction — all their lives without knowing it. (The Americans present knew better, of course, and said so.) Papers by the American Paula Feldman and Charles Robinson, both with the most entertaining members of the Shelley circle, Peacock, Byron, Shelley and Shelley's publisher, Christopher Oller; there was also an academic seminar on Leigh Hunt, as usual the unwitting source of embarrassment and misunderstanding.

Of all the Romantics, Shelley understood most clearly the relation of imagination to the technology that promises to destroy us and felt keenly the obligation of poets upon their time. With 2,000,000 people that the world was, and a vast "vast sepulchre" through nuclear plan or accident, the likelihood is that Shelley's poetry is going to be more and more relevant.

On the morning of the final day, five very different Scottish poets read from and spoke for too briefly about their work. Inevitably the questions of different languages arose. Ron Dunlop said that he felt in Scots but thought in English. Edwin Morgan claimed that the most important aspect of poetry was sound, and to prove it read a poem which only evolved into meaning in the final stanza.

Such grand matters did not appear to trouble the weary head of Kingsley Amis in the final discussion. As usual he wanted to talk about "hopefully". To round up the week's proceedings we had been promised a specially commissioned ode from Norman MacCaig which did not materialize. What we

got was a lively exchange of Amis, Delaney, MacCaig, and others. Someone made a pun about Borges. MacCaig, announcing the name with a snarl, butted in: "Borges is an absolute nuisance. There was some about shuffling into Amis, who had ignored for a while, pressed bewildered and asked: 'Are you talking about Burgess or Borges?' 'I can pronounce both,' said MacCaig. 'Burgess and it's the other one.' MacCaig also said that his first poem was a poem in Gaelic. If you gave him £1,000, MacCaig would be unperturbed by it. That morning he had read the poems in a voice of resonant ancestral echoes. It was one of the finest moments of this week about language, and few of us understood a word.

Among this week's contributors

PAUL BAILEY's novels include *At the Jerusalem*, 1967, and *A Distant Likeness*, 1973.
TORY BARNARD is Tutor in Modern History at Hertford College, Oxford.
ALAN BELL's biography of Sydney Smith will be published by Oxford University Press in October.
ANTHONY BURGESS's musical work included *Mr. W. S. A. Butler*, which was broadcast last November on BBC Radio 3.
JAMES CAMPBELL is editor of the *New Edinburgh Review*.
JUDITH CHERNAK's second novel *The Daughter* was published recently in the United States.
PETER CLARK is the author of *Liberals and Social Democrats*, 1975.
GARTH POWDERN is a Fellow of Peterhouse, Cambridge.
DAVID GASCOVNE's *Collected Poems* was published in 1965.
SIR BERNARD GERRARD's books include *Art and Literature, 1960 and The Sense of Order*, 1974.
DONALD HALL's *Gullinot Milking* was published in 1974.
ALISTAIR HARRIS's books include *Mrs. Browning*, 1962 and *A Voyage in Vain*, 1973.
PETER HERRINGWATER's most recent book is *The New Inquisition: Scholasticism and King*, 1980.
JOANNA HERRINGWATER is a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects' analogue of *Drawings by C. F. A. Voysey*, 1976.
THOMAS HONORIN's *Nigerian Perspectives* was published in a second edition in 1975.
LISA JARDINE's books include *Francis Bacon*, 1975.
DAVID LONDON's *The Modes of Modern Writing* was published in 1977.
NORBERT LYNTON is Professor of History at the University of Sussex. He was at art panel member of the Arts Council in the late 1960s; and on its staff from 1970-75.
E. J. MISHAN is a visiting Professor at the Centre for Banking and International Finance, at the University.
ALAN MONTEFIORE's books include *A Modern Introduction to Philosophy*, 1958.
JANET MORGAN edited *John Crossman's Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, 1976-77.
PETER NEUBERG's novel *Mr. Galt* was published in 1975.
ROBERT PATTERSON's books include *George Crankshank: A Revaluation*, 1974.
S. S. PRAWER's books include *Comparative Literary Studies: An Introduction*, 1973, and *Karl Marx's World Literature*, 1976.
W. D. REPPHORN is the author of *The private World of Jean Giono*, 1980.
NORMAN ROBERTS's books include *The Face of France*, 1976.
NIMIAN SMART's most recent book is *The Phenomenon of Chicago*, 1979.
FRITZ SPIEGEL is a musicologist.
J. P. STRAN is the author of *Nietzsche, 1978 and Hitler*, 1979.
RICHARD STROUD's books include *Way of the Samurai*, 1978.
PETER SURVILLANT is the author of *The Oxford University Press in the Nineteenth Century*, 1978.
NORMAN SURVILLANT is Professor of Experimental Psychology at the University of Essex.
E. M. L. THOMPSON is Professor of History in the University of London. His books include *English Land: Society in the Nineteenth Century*, 1963.
HUGH TINKER's *Rhinoceros of the Mind* was published in 1977.
C. F. ANDERSON and I have published this year.
R. S. TURNER's most recent book *Dear Old Blighy* was published earlier this year.
H. A. WILLIAMS's books include *Coming What? I Am*, 1977.
BARBARA WILKINSON, translator of Robert Pigeon's *Pigeon*, was published by John Calder, earlier this year.

Author, Author

Readers are invited to identify the sources of the three quotations which follow and to send us the answers so that they reach the office not later than Friday, September 26. A prize of £10 is offered for the most correct set of answers to be opened on the falling of the most nearly correct in which the inspired guesswork will be taken into consideration.

Entries should be addressed to the Editor, The Times Literary Supplement, P.O. Box 7, New Printing House Square, Gray's Inn Road, London, WC1X 8EZ, and marked "Author, Author" on the envelope. The solution and result will appear in our issue of October 3.

Competition No 35
1. She is behind a pillar, carefully withdrawn from the "Choir-master's view, but regards him with the closest attention." All unconscious of her presence, he chants and sings. She sings when he is most musically fervid, and when he is least so, she sings to him from behind the pillar's friendly shelter.

2. "Still, on the whole you are dear, sweet girl, and I only say, well, I know what I like; my dear papa does not like it to be talked about. And now come me up close, and let me see if I can't find out what you are up to. Cynthia and my new shade of powder are the perfect thing for you as an average little girl whose strings he pulled — as a horse whom he had backed and bridled by sheer power of intelligence, and whom he might ride to glory or the grave of pleasure. Which was it to be? He lingered long, relishing the details of schemes that he was too idle to pursue. Poor girl, upon a torment, he tasted the night the sweets of omnipotence and brooded like a deity over the arid desert of his intelligence, which was to share her before the summer waned.

The result of Competition No 34 will appear in our issue of September 26.

Linguistics

Sir — The letter (August 22) of Gerald Gazdar and Neil Smith, abusive, ungrammatical and incoherent, affords the reading public a rare glimpse at the Linguistics Association of Great Britain at work. Pronouncing ex cathedra, they condemn my review (July 11) of books by Roy Harris and Geoffrey Sampson. Since they candidly admit most of their criticisms are unprintable we must consider the ones printed as the best of a bad bunch. Their critical irrelevance to what I wrote can be explained only on the assumption that Gazdar and Smith are totally ignorant of the books under review, as the following points make clear.

They declare "quite false" my statement that Harris, Sampson and Chomsky are concerned with what is known in the trade as Sociolinguistics and Psycholinguistics. Yet Harris's work is catalogued as Sociolinguistics on the fly-leaf of his book. A critical and historical survey of many topics coming under this head. Chomsky is notorious for his writings on language and mind; and Sampson's book is part of a two-volume critique of Chomsky's social, political and psychological views and their relation to his language theory. To validate their absurd claim Gazdar and Smith then insult these scholars as having done no research in these fields.

Am I accused of "gratuitous Latinisms"? This can only refer to "centocentric surrogationalism", which a reader of Professor Harris's book would know to be his coinage, not mine.

Gazdar and Smith dismiss my reference to Popper, Lorenz, etc. as irrelevant, quite unaware that even invoked as authorities, in the books reviewed.

Only ignorance of Sampson's central argument against Chomsky (which seeks to drive a wedge between syntax and semantics) could inspire criticism of my statement of the obvious: that syntax has a semantic function, like all else in language.

Gazdar and Smith object to the mention of Sociolinguistics. With good reason: it is the cult name for a jumble of misconceptions about evolution, behaviour and intelligence which they comically exemplify in their inability to distinguish between language and behaviour, and in their fulsome acceptance of Chomsky's biological fantasy that syntax is genetically determined. Harris and Sampson also lean this way at times, yet they come much closer than most linguists to a genuine evolutionary approach to language theory, a theme I sought to develop. That Gazdar and Smith could not follow the argument should by now occasion no surprise.

All in all, both the tone and content of their review are indicative of Dr Sampson's final conclusion: that theoretical linguistics today is an "academic hoax", perpetrated in "the vested interests of a profession" to which Messrs Gazdar and Smith so clearly belong. By contrast, suggested the discipline might have a rosy future, could indeed become the linchpin of the humanities, if only it could set itself in a proper evolutionary perspective, detach itself from metaphysical and pseudo-scientific pretensions, and make contact with what Kant once called "the salutary bathos of experience".

T. P. WALDRON.
Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages, University of Cambridge.

"Madame Bovary"

Sir — Anita Brookner's review of *Hermia Oliver's Flaubert and the English Governess* (August 8) suggests a solution to a passage in *Madame Bovary* that has puzzled me for years and provides, at the same time, a splendid example of how acquaintance with one foreigner (in this case Miss Julia Herber) can beget a stereotyped image of the alien nation as a whole.

Emma is shown into Maitre Gull's dining-room, where, we are told, "tout calculé d'une propriété métaphysique, anglaise" (my italics), though by French standards the English suffer from a "maladie" to be, as the proverbial German translation, for example, have occasionally

to the editor

We very much regret that The Times Literary Supplement could not be published last week: this was because of an industrial dispute.

Kodály

Sir — To mark the centenary of Zoltán Kodály's birth we are hoping to publish as comprehensive a selection of his letters as possible. I should be very glad to receive from any of your readers copies or originals of Kodály's correspondence in their possession. I shall of course return all originals (by registered mail). I should like to see even those letters which the owners do not consider suitable for publication. I am also interested in letters written by other people and signed by Kodály, and in particular letters written on his behalf by Mrs Emma Kodály or myself.

If by any chance letters contain underlining, could the owners please indicate whether or not the underlining is Kodály's. I should also like to know the exact address of the letter and, if possible, the date. Lastly I should appreciate any material relating to Kodály's music text or acknowledged source, and unsupported assertions.

In the third paragraph, Mr Walker makes the statement: "Everybody... read [The Spectator] when it came out three times a week..." Such a basic error of fact (or ignorance of?) literary fact must almost immediately throw doubt on Mr Walker's critical perceptions.

Equally evasive of confidence in his knowledge is an adjoining assertion: "The works they wrote apart from each other, and they were in so far as they are remembered at all. It is by their joint endeavours on *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*." Not only does he derogate the indisputable reputation of periodicals (not to mention the *Guardian*), but by sly omission dismisses the innovative influence of Steele's comedies so ably edited by Shirley Simm Kenny, the remarkable popularity of *Cato*, documented by Donald Bond, *The Presbyter* and several pieces of well-known miscellaneous writing. (We know nothing of the present biographical interest in Addison and Steele, or Steele and Addison, as Mr Walker would prefer.)

The reviewer is far more intent on undermining Addison than Steele, and the result is an often irrelevant confusion between the biographical and the literary. Without evidence, he is pleased to ascribe to Steele's "openness" how does he account for the letter's *sub rosa* dealings with Harley in 1730? Moreover, Mr Walker cannot understand why Pope's *Atticus* lines — among the most famous in English literature — are never reproduced in a volume whose plain limitations are early explained by B. C. Southam, the General Editor. In fact, the *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot* (including the *Atticus* line numbers) is alluded to and discussed at least three times.

Mr Walker faults the editors for "strangely" omitting Steele's "pointed allusion" to Addison's homosexuality. Now that is a fashionable bromide which has nothing to do with the passages they cite, from both *The Old Way* and *The Plebeian*. Do we indeed know that Addison was a homosexual, or — if we follow Steele's "pointed allusion" still further — that he lusted after "youths of about fifteen, stark naked"? Steele himself reads that he wishes "to avoid the least appearance of Personal Reflection". His remark caters to an audience who need the relief of allusion in a rather dry exchange on how best to preserve a public against the horrors that follow the abandonment of a "mixed government", the basis of English constitutionality.

And what will Mr Walker make of Pope's dark insinuation that Joseph Spence took Addison and the great woman Steele were engaged in unnatural, probably deviant, behaviour? This debate about Addison's sexuality has been battled without live ammunition since 1926. Can we not declare a truce until documented evidence is found?

EDWARD A. BLOOM.
LILLIAN B. BLOOM.
Providence, Rhode Island, U.S.A.

Spain would have entered the war. Fortunately, Hitler did not solve before Franco's pretensions.

Whatever one may think of the value of hypothetical historical speculations, it must be evident to all that such speculations which have as their point of departure completely arranged "facts" are a waste of everybody's time.

HERBERT R. SOUTHWORTH.
Le Petit Prievré, Rue de l'Église, 36170 St Benoit du Sault (Indre), France.

As for my omitting to mention that when T. P. Powys left Suffolk to spend the rest of his life in Dorset he did not spend all of that time in the same place in Dorset, that really does seem to be neither here nor there. The description of his house, Benllyn, as "a hideous red-brick box with ugly windows" was of course David Garnett's, not mine.

Mr Diffey correctly spotted the inaccuracy in the sentence, "John Cowper Powys spent the larger part of most years between 1933 and 1963 in America." This was a misreading somewhere along the line between pen and print. I had written between the ages of 33 and 63 (a fact which I had taken from page twenty-five of the book under review). I am glad to correct this error.

ISABEL COLGATE.
Midford Castle, Bath BA2 7DU.

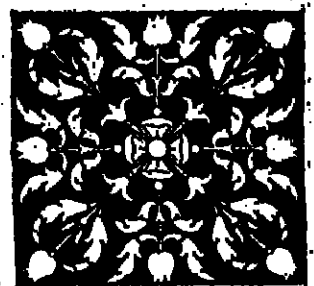
The Powys Brothers

Sir — In answer to T. J. Diffey's objections (Letter, August 22) to my remarks about the Powys brothers in my review of *Belinda Humfrey's Recollections of the Powys Brothers* (August 1), may I say that in having "moral philosophy" among John Cowper Powys's many avocations I intended no implication that this was his profession. That he was an amateur moral philosopher must surely be clear to anyone who reads *The Art of Happiness*, let alone his many other essays on similar themes.

As for my omitting to mention that when T. P. Powys left Suffolk to spend the rest of his life in Dorset he did not spend all of that time in the same place in Dorset, that really does seem to be neither here nor there. The description of his house, Benllyn, as "a hideous red-brick box with ugly windows" was of course David Garnett's, not mine.

ISABEL COLGATE.
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